

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

JUAN A. PENA,

Civil No. 05-2181 (DWF/FLN)

Petitioner,

v.

**REPORT AND
RECOMMENDATION**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Respondent.

THIS MATTER is before the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge on Petitioner's application for habeas corpus relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2241. The case has been referred to this Court for report and recommendation pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636 and Local Rule 72.1. For the reasons discussed below, it is recommended that the petition for writ of habeas corpus be summarily dismissed pursuant to Rule 4 of The Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases In The United States District Courts.¹

I. BACKGROUND

In 2003, Petitioner was convicted in the United States District Court for the District of Nebraska for an undisclosed federal criminal offense. He was sentenced to 60 months in federal prison, and he is presently serving his sentence at the Federal Correctional Institution in Waseca, Minnesota. (Petition, [Docket No. 1], p. 2, ¶s 1-5.)

¹ Rule 4 provides that "[i]f it plainly appears from the petition and any attached exhibits that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court, the judge must dismiss the petition and direct the clerk to notify the petitioner." Although The Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases are most directly applicable to habeas petitions filed by state prisoners pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254, they also may be applied to habeas cases brought under 28 U.S.C. § 2241. Rule 1(b); Mickelson v. United States, Civil No. 01-1750 (JRT/SRN), (D.Minn. 2002), 2002 WL 31045849 at *2; Bostic v. Carlson, 884 F.2d 1267, 1270, n.1, (9th Cir. 1989); Rothstein v. Pavlick, No. 90 C 5558 (N.D.Ill. 1990), 1990 WL 171789 at *3.

According to Petitioner's present habeas corpus petition, he did not challenge his conviction or sentence on direct appeal, and he has never challenged his conviction or sentence in a motion brought under 28 U.S.C. § 2255, or in any other collateral proceeding. (Petition, p. 2, ¶ 7, p. 4, ¶ 10.)

Petitioner is now attempting to challenge his federal prison sentence, for the first time, in his current § 2241 habeas corpus petition. He claims that he should have received a shorter sentence under the "Fast Track" program authorized by the United States Sentencing Guidelines.²

² A 2004 law review article provides the following description – and criticism – of the so-called "Fast-Track Programs":

"Fast-track programs allow a prosecutor to offer a defendant a reduced sentence in exchange for a pre-indictment guilty plea. These programs have been used unofficially along the southwest border for several years. Official recognition of fast-track programs came in 2003, when Congress passed the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today ("PROTECT") Act, [footnote omitted] which officially sanctioned the use of fast-track programs in limited circumstances. [Footnote omitted.] Not all districts are allowed to use these programs; fast-track may only be employed if a district has an exceptional circumstance that warrants the adoption of a fast-track program. [Footnote omitted.] In drug and immigration cases, approval likely will be reserved for districts along the southwest border. [Footnote omitted.] Implementation of the fast-track program means that sentencing in southwest border districts is guaranteed to be different from sentencing in non-border districts. By creating a situation where the severity of the sentence depends only upon place of arrest, the fast-track program promotes disparity in sentencing. Accordingly, the program contravenes the spirit of the United States Sentencing Guidelines ("Sentencing Guidelines"), which were established to prevent disparity between similarly situated defendants."

Erin T. Middleton, Fast-Track to Disparity: How Federal Sentencing Policies Along the Southwest Border are Undermining the Sentencing Guidelines and Violating Equal Protection, 2004 UTAH L. REV. 827, 827-28.

For the reasons discussed below, the Court concludes that Petitioner cannot raise his present claims for relief in a § 2241 habeas corpus petition. It will therefore be recommended that this action be summarily dismissed for lack of jurisdiction.

II. DISCUSSION

As a general rule, a federal prisoner can maintain a collateral challenge to his conviction or sentence only by filing a motion in the trial court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255. The fifth paragraph of § 2255 provides that

“[a]n application for a writ of habeas corpus in behalf of a prisoner who is authorized to apply for relief by motion pursuant to this section [i.e., § 2255], shall not be entertained if it appears that the applicant has failed to apply for relief, by motion, to the court which sentenced him, or that such court has denied him relief, unless it also appears that the remedy by motion is inadequate or ineffective to test the legality of his detention.”

In effect, a motion brought in the trial court under § 2255 is the exclusive remedy available to a federal prisoner who is asserting a collateral challenge to his conviction or sentence. Hill v. Morrison, 349 F.3d 1089, 1091 (8th Cir. 2003) (“[i]t is well settled a collateral challenge to a federal conviction or sentence must generally be raised in a motion to vacate filed in the sentencing court under § 2255... and not in a habeas petition filed in the court of incarceration... under § 2241”). No court has jurisdiction to hear such a challenge under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 (or otherwise), unless the Petitioner has affirmatively demonstrated that the remedy provided by § 2255 “is inadequate or ineffective to test the legality of...[his] detention.” DeSimone v. Lacy, 805 F.2d 321, 323 (8th Cir. 1986) (per curiam), quoting 28 U.S.C. § 2255. See also Von Ludwitz v. Ralston, 716 F.2d 528, 529 (8th Cir. 1983) (per curiam) (same).

In this case, it is readily apparent that Petitioner is challenging the validity of the sentence he received in his Nebraska federal criminal case. Petitioner obviously believes that his sentence is improper, and should now be reduced. Indeed, he specifically contends that he is “entitled to [a] 4-point [downward] departure.” Because Petitioner is challenging the validity of the sentence imposed by the trial court judge, his present petition is clearly barred by § 2255’s exclusive remedy rule.

In some cases, a § 2241 habeas petition that is barred by the exclusive remedy rule can simply be construed to be a motion brought under § 2255. The matter can then be transferred to the trial court so the prisoner’s claims can be addressed on the merits there. In this case, however, Petitioner is presently barred from seeking relief under § 2255 because of the one-year statute of limitations applicable to § 2255 motions. 28 U.S.C. § 2255[¶ 6]. If the present petition were construed to be a § 2255 motion and transferred to the trial court, the motion would have to be immediately denied as untimely.

Furthermore, it clearly appears that Petitioner deliberately elected to seek relief under the § 2241 habeas corpus statute, perhaps because he believes that the remedy provided by § 2255 is “inadequate or ineffective to test the legality” of his sentence. He apparently thinks that his current petition is exempt from § 2255’s exclusive remedy rule, and that he can challenge his sentence in a § 2241 habeas corpus proceeding, because he is not presently eligible for relief under § 2255. That reasoning must be rejected.

The procedural rules that limit the availability of relief under § 2255, including the one-year statute of limitations, would be rendered meaningless if a prisoner who is procedurally barred from bringing a § 2255 motion could simply argue that the remedy provided by that statute has become “inadequate or ineffective,” and that he should

therefore be allowed to bring his claims in a § 2241 habeas corpus petition. Congress could not have intended for the procedural restrictions on § 2255 motions – including the statute of limitations – to be so easily evaded. The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals presumably had this in mind when it held that § 2255 will not be viewed as inadequate or ineffective “merely because § 2255 relief has already been denied,... or because Petitioner has been denied permission to file a second or successive § 2255 motion... or because a second or successive § 2255 motion has been dismissed, ... or because Petitioner has allowed the one year statute of limitations and/or grace period to expire.” United States v. Lurie, 207 F.3d 1075, 1077 (8th Cir. 2000) (citations omitted). See also United States ex rel Perez v. Warden, FMC Rochester, 286 F.3d 1059, 1061-62 (8th Cir.) (reaffirming that § 2255 is not rendered inadequate or ineffective by operation of the rules limiting successive § 2255 motions), cert. denied, 537 U.S. 869 (2002); Hill, 349 F.3d at 1091 (“in order to establish a remedy is ‘inadequate or ineffective’ under § 2255, there must be more than a procedural barrier to bringing a § 2255 petition”).

“A federal prisoner should be permitted to seek habeas corpus [under § 2241] only if he had no reasonable opportunity to obtain earlier judicial correction of a fundamental defect in his conviction or sentence because the law changed after his first 2255 motion.” In re: Davenport, 147 F.3d 605, 611 (7th Cir. 1998) (emphasis added). Applying this rule here, the Court finds that Petitioner is not eligible for habeas corpus relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2241. He has already had two reasonable opportunities to raise his current claims for relief. He could have raised them in a direct appeal, and he could have raised them in a timely motion for relief under § 2255. Petitioner cannot contend that § 2255 has become “inadequate or ineffective” simply because he failed to take advantage of those prior

opportunities, and he is now no longer eligible for relief under § 2255. Because the “inadequate or ineffective remedy” exception is not available to Petitioner, his present § 2241 habeas corpus petition, which challenges his federal prison sentence, cannot be entertained here. See Bauer v. Ashcroft, Civil No. 02-4068 (JRT/FLN) (D.Minn. 2003) (Tunheim, J.), 2003 WL 541692 at *2.

III. CONCLUSION

In sum, the Court finds that: (1) Petitioner’s current application for habeas corpus relief challenges the validity of his original sentencing proceedings in the trial court; (2) such challenges can be raised only in a motion for relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2255, unless the remedy provided by that statute is “inadequate or ineffective;” (3) the instant petition cannot be construed as a § 2255 motion, because Petitioner is barred from seeking relief under § 2255 by the one-year statute of limitations that applies to such motions, and (4) Petitioner’s present inability to seek relief under § 2255 does not cause the remedy provided by § 2255 to be “inadequate or ineffective” so as to excuse him from § 2255’s exclusive remedy rule. Thus, the Court concludes that Petitioner’s current § 2241 habeas corpus petition cannot be entertained here, and that the petition should be summarily dismissed for lack of jurisdiction. See DeSimone, 805 F.2d at 323-24 (§ 2241 habeas petition challenging criminal court proceedings was properly dismissed for lack of subject matter jurisdiction, where § 2255 motion was not shown to be an inadequate or ineffective remedy).

Lastly, the Court notes that Petitioner did not pay the \$5.00 filing fee for this action, but instead applied for leave to proceed in forma pauperis, (“IFP”). (Docket No. 2.) Because Petitioner has failed to state an actionable habeas corpus claim, his IFP

application will be denied. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii); see also, Kruger v. Erickson, 77 F.3d 1071, 1074, n. 3 (8th Cir. 1996) (per curiam) (IFP application should be denied where habeas petition cannot be entertained).

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the foregoing, and all the files, records and proceedings herein,

IT IS HEREBY RECOMMENDED that:

(1) Petitioner's application for leave to proceed in forma pauperis, (Docket No. 2), be DENIED; and

(2) Petitioner's application for habeas corpus relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2241, (Docket No. 1), be DISMISSED for lack of jurisdiction.

Dated: September 20, 2005

s/ Franklin L. Noel
FRANKLIN L. NOEL
United States Magistrate Judge

Pursuant to the Local Rules, any party may object to this Report and Recommendation by filing with the Clerk of Court and serving on all parties, on or before **October 7, 2005**, written objections which specifically identify the portions of the proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is being made, and a brief in support thereof. A party may respond to the objecting party's brief within ten days after service thereof. All briefs filed under the rules shall be limited to 3500 words. A judge shall make a de novo determination of those portions to which objection is made. This Report and Recommendation does not constitute an order or judgment of the District Court, and it is, therefore, not appealable to the Circuit Court of Appeals.